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I shall be happy to find, through the medium of your Magazine, that this hint has been followed up, by some actual experiments on the subject, as I know there are many persons in your town fully qualified, in every respect, for the employment, and I need not say how anxious I shall be for some account of a series of well conducted experiments on a matter of so much importance.

I am sir, your sincere well-wisher, &c.

MECHANICUS.

Newry, Sept. 8th, 1808.

ESSAY ON IRISH BULLS.

(Continued from p. x. of Vol. 1.)

JUSTIN also, in describing the warlike character of the Amazons, has the following passage, conveying a statement not altogether unlike the idea of Fielding, "Neque otio, neque lanificio, sed armis, equis, venationibus *exercebant*," in English, "They *exercised* themselves neither in *idleness* nor in spinning wool, but in arms, horsemanship and hunting."

The jokes of Hierocles have been a fruitful source of *Hibernian blunders*, (I speak as an Englishman.) It is needless to insert them here, as I believe they are to be found translated in the fourth Edition of Edgeworth's Essay on Irish bulls*.

Shakespear says, "Cæsar never *did wrong* but in *just cause*." I cannot find that this species of bull has ever been attributed to an Irishman: perhaps there are some bulls, which like certain rights, are unalienable, and cannot be wrested from those who hold high employments in the manor of Parnassus*.

Should poor Paddy dare to talk of a *horse-race* between two *asses*, we should see it immediately in Italics in every British news-paper, from the mouth of the Ply to the Tweed. But let the divine Homer introduce his goddess of wisdom exhorting Pandarus† to promise an *hecatomb* (i. e. an offering consisting of an hundred oxen) of white *lambs* to Apollo; could Minerva be, with poetical propriety accused of making a *Bull*? Oh, ne upon it!!

A worthy Friar of the Franciscan order, mentions a circumstance in support of the credit of his favourite saint, which must be believed *quia impossibile*. It is that on a time St. Francis was by some hazard thrown ashore on a *desolate island*, and in the short space of half an hour he converted ten thousand of the inhabitants!!! This too remains to be attributed to an Hibernian.

One of Dryden's plays was damned by the severity of the Duke of Buckingham's witticism upon the following line,

"My wound is *great*, it is so very *small*."

To which the Duke wittily subjoined,

"Then 'twould be *greater* were it *none at all*."

This I consider one of the happiest instances of the *argumentum ad absurdum* on record. The genius of the Duke enabled him to see Dryden's bull intuitively, and his ability instantly provided him with a very natural deduction, which placed the absurdity in the most palpable light.

Sir John Perrot, in his account of the State of Ireland during the reign of Elizabeth, observes, "that more *Englishmen* were born in *Wexford* than in

house clocks, and perhaps astronomers would find it equally objectionable, as the *beat* of the pendulum could not be heard in *vacuo*. Perhaps the following might be applied with better effect in every respect; exhausting the cylinder intended to contain the clock-work, filling it with carbonic acid gas, in lieu of atmospheric air, and then making it air-tight, the superior density of the former, will increase the sound of the pendulum, the oxidification of the metal is avoided, as in the case of the *vacuum*, and perhaps, too, the dilatation and contraction of pendulum and work may be in a great measure done away, by means of the medium in which they are contained.

* Sir John Carr, in his Tour through Ireland, mentions that a certain Agricultural Society in England having heard much in praise of the said Essay on Irish Bulls, instantly commissioned their Secretary to procure twelve copies of the Essay, in order to examine its contents, and to ascertain whether it might not contain some hints towards the improvement of the horned cattle in England!!!

* This Bull from Shakespear is given on the authority of Ben Johnson. It is but justice to add that Rowe affirms, he has never met with the above line in any copy of Shakespear.

† See Iliad, Book iv. Verse 102.

all Ireland put together!!! Bull upon Bull.

"Are you dead Paddy?" "No, by J----s, but I'm speechless," cries Paddy....Now it is, I must confess, a wonderful faculty in any human being, to possess the power of *utterance*, while labouring under an utter *inability to speak*, for which reason I am at a loss which to prefer, this answer of Paddy, or the original from which the story is made up. In the Timon of Lucian, in the latter end of the fifteenth section, we find the following Dialogue, to which I allude: *Gnatho.* "I will summon you before the Areopagus for injuring me thus."....*Timon.* Stay but a short time, and you shall have an opportunity of *accusing* me of your *murder too!!!* If it be wonderful for an Irishman to speak when stunned, the wonder is increased when we observe that *Gnatho* might possess a similar power, though completely dead.

Timon also, in the warmth of his misanthropy, comes to the resolution of having no intercourse with mankind, and carries this resolution to such unwarrantable lengths, as to make him determine to erect *his own monument, yes, gentle reader, his own monument, over his own dead body;* this, perhaps, might have furnished the foundation of the story of St. Patrick swimming from Port-Patrick to Donaghadee, with his head in his mouth.

"An Irishman was once observed with his eyes shut, sitting before a looking-glass; on being asked the reason; "By my shoul," cries Paddy, "I wanted to see how I look when I am asleep."

For the source of this, see the jokes of Hierocles, No. 10; where he is himself guilty of the blunder which he attributes to his *silly fellow.*

The blunder of Sir Richard Blackmore, in contriving to make the grandsire of Vortigern strip a naked Pict of his doublet, is not of Irish character; it appears to be somewhat akin to the strong expression of antiquity slaying Marsyas a *second time.* Perhaps however, the unfortunate wight had a body of a particular kind, which, like the cork-tree, or the testaceous animals, could produce one skin when the other had fallen off, or was torn from his flesh.

Menippus, in Lucian, vaunts of his tranquillity while sailing across the *Styx.* "For," quoth he, "I was the only passenger of all the others, who did not weep."

Milton observes in like strain, that Adam was,

"The *goodliest of men since born,*
"His sons, the fairest of her daughters, Eve."

And in a monthly publication of the British metropolis, it is somewhere remarked, that Bonaparte is usually the plainest *dressed* man of *his retinue.* There is something unusually ludicrous in a man's walking *behind himself,* yet, upon second thoughts, there is no knowing the extent of what that wonderful man can do, and though he may be too wise and too sensible to be *beside himself,* this may not prevent him from being *behind himself* occasionally.

Here follows a short list of blunders purely British....In the April of 1806, the following bill was stuck up in a window in Cheshire:

"This house to be let for *ever,* or *longer if required.*" Mr. Edgeworth has recorded a bull of the same kind, of an English shop-keeper who endeavoured to recommend a piece of stuff to a lady, by assuring her that it would last as a gown *for ever,* and might be converted into a petticoat afterwards.

Perhaps there is no language in existence or on record, so replete with blunders as the English. A foreigner conversant in the language, but who had previously never heard the expression, "boil the kettle," must be very naturally struck on observing such a direction given to a servant for the first time: he would, I must suppose, conceive the kettle to be some rare esculent, which his friend, in the warmth of his hospitality, is going to treat him with, and which requires only the process of boiling. I can easily fancy to myself the eager curiosity of a guest while the supposed dainty is undergoing the seething process, fully satisfied in his own mind, "that as John Bull is so sharp on his neighbour *Teague,* for the absurdity of his expressions, there can be no blunder in the sentence."

It is true, indeed, that the *ahæna undantia* of poetry, may be pointed

out as an instance of this form of expression, but surely, this is a degree of presumption in *common conversation* to arrogate to herself the privileges of her mistress, who may say in the words of Horace:

——— "Meæ (contendere noli)
"*Stultitiam* patiuntur opes.———

She is privileged to snatch a grace beyond the reach of *common sense*, but this is only the privilege of great folks.

Light the pipe, is another of the blunders of the English language, and is just as allowable in the eye of common sense, as if we should say, "*roast the spit*," "*bake the oven*," "*stew the pan*," &c. &c.

"*Light the fire*," here is an expression, for which the figures of speech have entered no defence; it is an instance of *blundering* in expression, which has *no parallel*, and I believe is confined to the English language*. Should it, however, be found in others, its adoption into the English should make them pause before they have the hardihood to accuse us of committing errors of the same kind. They charge us with occasionally making egregious blunders, while their own language exhibits *permanent and regularly adopted bulls!!* I understand it is frequently the practice amongst *swindlers*, &c. &c. in London, when pursued by any of the retainers of justice, to join in the general cry, of "*Stop the thief*;" by which they frequently escape pursuit, and not unusually contrive to fix the attention of the mob on some *innocent person*, who thus is made the means of favouring the retreat of a notorious delinquent. Is the usual cry of "*blundering Teague*," kept up on a more honourable motive, or with a more respectable intention?

* The French form of expression is thus, "*Faites de feu.*" In Latin, "*Extrue ligno focum*" (perhaps the admirers of Virgil may say otherwise). In Italian, the form of expression is the same as in the French. In Greek, Εμβαλεῖν το πυρ, "*To put (or throw) on the fire.*" It is to be observed here, that I have noticed only the commonly used forms of expression in the different languages above cited.

In Brewster's edition of Ferguson's Mechanical Lectures, the editor informs us of his invention of a new kind of convex *glasses* intended for microscopes, composed of *turpentine varnish*: surely this is as bad as a *horse-race* between *two asses*.

Mr. Nicholson (the journalist, essayist, encyclopædist, economist, chemist, F.R.S. L.L.D. A.B.C.D, &c. &c. to the end of the alphabet) suggests also *his* new invention of cross *wires* for telescopes, made of a species of *metal* denominated *spider's web**.

It may possibly be remarked here, that these are expressions understood by every body, and that the inaccuracy causes no misunderstanding of the meaning of the author. I have no objection to this apology for this inaccuracy of language. But, "*hanc veniam damus, petimusque vicissim.*" I

* The critique on Crabbe's Poems, in the last number of the Edinburgh Review, has started a singular idea, which I would be glad to have elucidated satisfactorily. Talking of the *Knights of the Ferula* (Anglice *School-masters*) it is observed that "Goldsmith has described him inimitably, so has Shenstone, *with a slight change of sex*, and Crabbe has in two passages followed their footsteps."

Being aware of the metaphysical dexterity of our Caledonian brethren, I have to deprecate a too profuse application of it, in unravelling the mystery, which is unquestionably couched in the above-cited passage. In my humble apprehension, it means simply this, that Goldsmith has described the schoolmaster *inimitably*, and Shenstone has likewise described him *inimitably*, but with this difference that Shenstone's *schoolmaster* is *an old woman*; which difference, according to the Edinburgh Review, is affected by a *slight* change of sex. What species of *slight* change it is that produces this effect, I am at a loss to conjecture, as my logic informs me that whatsoever is not a *differentia essentialis* must be a *proprium* or an *accident*; perhaps, however, the two sexes may in the opinion of the Reviewers, be approximating to each other as they advance in years, without ever absolutely meeting, like the asymptote in the higher geometry, and between an old schoolmaster and an antique schoolmistress the difference may be so *slight* as to be considered (*critically* speaking) a mere *minimum*, *a vox & præterea nihil.*

am only objecting to the limited, ungenerous manner in which this privilege is allowed to be pleaded. An author of eminence, whose situation in life affords him an opportunity of improving his acquirements, is permitted to express himself inaccurately with impunity, while a poor uninformed being, who is liable to any circumstance that can keep his mind in a state of literary darkness, is, by an unjust appropriation of this privilege, become the butt of sarcasm and ridicule, upon a charge, which appears to me incapable of standing a common examination; the usual mode of proving this charge, is by making the assertion, that the Irish are peculiarly hasty in their tempers, but this peculiar hastiness still remains to be proved, and of course its existence is still liable to be questioned. They undoubtedly possess passions, which, like those of other nations, not completely educated, are subject to considerable inequalities. Introduce arts and manufactures into the country, and the asperities of the national character must perforce, be gradually worn off. The Italian proverb, "the devil tempts mankind, but the idle man tempts the devil," might be remembered with advantage by political economists; and to the establishment of systematic industry alone, we must look with any degree of confidence, for lowering the temperature of the national character.

The wit attributed to the lower orders of the Irish, is, I believe, a qualification too generously attributed to them; they undoubtedly possess wit and shrewdness to a more than usual extent, but for the possession of these two, they are indebted rather to their peculiar circumstances. Their poverty obliges them to exercise their faculties incessantly, in devising means to support themselves: this gives them a readiness of thought, which rarely deserts them in any emergency. The excuses of an Irish peasant, the shifts, the evasions he can resort to, provided he be not actually detected in any unfair transaction, might, if generally observed, be justly deemed *proverbial*, but when once he shall be placed in a situation similar to the English mechanic, whenever his thoughts shall be confined within the narrow circle of his daily employment (the making, for example, of pins' points) the neighbouring ale-house, and the adjoining skittle ground, his abilities must consequently lose in their extent, though the substitution of accuracy may upon the whole, be a valuable one in every point of view.

His wit must also suffer in a similar degree. In fact these two qualifications, wit and shrewdness usually accompany a certain stage of civilization amongst the lower orders of every nation. Ignorance produces wit, and necessity shrewdness. Our neighbours, the Scotch, are remarkable for the latter, and I never understood them to be particularly distinguished for the former, which has suffered from the general diffusion of knowledge amongst them, while the scantiness of their means has left the other qualification unimpaired; those who are eternally holding up the Irish peasantry to our view as wits, are only giving us infallible proofs of their state of misery and wretchedness. It was remarked of old, that the places renowned for oracular reputation, were in general the most wretched: it were devoutly to be wished that we did not exhibit so many sad proofs of our similarity of situation to that of Delphos and Dodona! !

Perhaps, sir, you may suppose from my manner, and the positive language I have used throughout this paper, that I am incapable of listening to any thing which may serve to controvert what I have advanced; so far from this being the case, I have to assure you that I have expressed myself in a manner thus positive, rather with the view of promoting discussion, than of putting a termination to the examination of the subject, and though I must, upon the whole, express my scepticism, as to the charge brought against our national character, I am still willing *audire alteram partem*. When our authors of eminence shall be convicted of absurdities such as I have pointed out amongst the writers of other nations, it must be something more than national prejudice, which shall prevent me from acknowledging the justice of the general imputation against us. Yours, &c.

EREBINO.